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United Nations A/56/297

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 August 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Item 118 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries: Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Report of the Secretary-General**

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* A/56/150.

** The footnote requested by General Assembly resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

01-51353 (E) 200901

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I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/187 of 18 December 1997, the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, hosted by the European Union (EU), was held at the Brussels headquarters of the European Parliament from 14 to 20 May 2001. The Assembly had designated the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as the focal point for the preparations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, and the Secretary-General of UNCTAD served as its Secretary-General. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, in which 159 Governments participated, reviewed the socio-economic progress in the least developed countries during the 1990s, and progress in international support measures during that decade; and unanimously adopted, at its closing plenary meeting on 20 May 2001, a Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010[1] containing commitments at the national and international levels on policies and measures for accelerating the development process in those countries during the decade. It also adopted a political declaration, the Brussels Declaration.[2]

2. In its resolution 55/214 of 20 December 2000, recalling its resolution 52/187, as well as its resolutions 53/182 of 15 December 1998 and 54/235 of 23 December 1999, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on the outcome of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The present report has been prepared in response to that request. Section two provides an assessment of the outcome of the Conference, and section three contains an account of the preparatory process for the Conference.

II. Outcome of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

3. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries was an important occasion with respect to drawing world attention to, and bringing into sharp political focus, the problems of the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. Drawing on the experience and lessons from the 1990s, and building on the outcome of recent major United Nations conferences and summits in the specific context of least developed countries, it was able to agree on a number of commitments and a broad set of actions to be undertaken by least developed countries and their development partners during the decade.

4. The Brussels Declaration and the Programme of Action reflect the continued and strong commitment of the international community to significantly improving the human condition of more than 600 million people in 49 least developed countries during the present decade. Against the backdrop of lack of progress in socio-economic development in the least developed countries and in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s,[3] it launched a process and provided a framework for a strong global partnership to accelerate sustained economic growth and sustainable development in least developed countries, to end marginalization by eradicating poverty, inequality and deprivation in these countries, and to enable them to integrate beneficially into the global economy.

5. The overarching goal of the Programme of Action is to make substantial progress towards halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger by the year 2015 and to promote the sustainable development of the least developed countries. It was recognized that this would require, among other things, significant and steady increases in gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates in least developed countries. To that end, least developed countries, with the support of their development partners, will strive to attain a GDP growth rate of at least 7 per cent per annum and to increase the ratio of investment to GDP to 25 per cent per annum.

6. Another important objective of the Programme of Action is to contribute to the renovation and invigoration of partnership between the least developed countries and their development partners by promoting mutual and shared responsibility, as well as greater opportunity and integration of the least developed countries into the global economy. The Programme of Action, among other things, should create conditions necessary for the implementation of policies and strategies based on the new development paradigm where economic growth and development are prerequisites of the eradication of poverty. It should

also contribute to the growth and expansion of the private sector, entrepreneurship and innovation by facilitating access to technology, private capital flows and other related resources.

7. The main innovative feature of the Programme of Action is the focus on action-oriented commitments by least developed countries and their development partners. Although by and large, these commitments are in the form of best endeavour, they mark a significant departure from the previous two programmes of action by clearly indicating complementary actions between least developed countries and their development partners in seven areas: fostering a people-centred policy framework; good governance at national and international levels; building human and institutional capacities; building productive capacities to make globalization work for least developed countries; enhancing the role of trade in development; reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment; and mobilizing financial resources. The commitments undertaken at the Conference in those areas, if fully and effectively implemented, will change for the better the difficult conditions faced by least developed countries.

8. The Conference was launched with an interactive debate on "The Challenge of Eradicating Poverty for Sustainable Development: International Community Response". Heads of States of least developed countries, high-level representatives from the international community — the United Nations, EU, donors, non-governmental organizations and the business community — were called upon to debate key issues, expectations and opportunities for the Conference and beyond. Selected panellists were invited to set the tone for a results- and commitment-oriented Conference.

9. The organization of the Conference was unlike that of the past two Conferences. The fact that, in addition to the intergovernmental track focusing on the formulation of the new Programme of Action, it included a country-level track to prepare national-level programmes of action for individual least developed countries, an "early deliverables" thematic track leading to specific actions and initiatives for immediate implementation, and a civil society track, including the NGO forum, facilitated the launching of several important and concrete initiatives in the context of what was called the "deliverables". The concept of deliverables was intended to give an action-oriented character to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries as compared with the past two Conferences. Through this initiative, the international community, individually and/or collectively, was accorded an opportunity to provide concrete policy actions in a number of areas reflected in the Programme of Action. The expectations for deliverables generated a momentum to reach important decisions, which would not have been possible without the Conference.

10. The "Everything But Arms (EBA)" initiative taken by EU and the announcement by EU of a multilateral initiative to forgo the use of anti-dumping measures in relation to least developed countries, perhaps the most pernicious remaining trade barriers, symptomize this process. Other countries (including Hungary, Morocco, New Zealand and Norway) announced similar initiatives during the Conference. The EU initiative is an important one in its own right, but even more so because it abolishes with one stroke the tariff peaks that have tended to hit precisely the products in which least developed countries are competitive (or potentially so) and tariff escalation which drives least developed countries towards exporting primary commodities, rather than higher value added processed products. Agreements reached also included initiatives relating to the investment and infrastructure necessary for least developed countries to be able to take advantage of market openings. A multi-agency technical assistance programme on foreign direct investment (FDI) for least developed countries was launched, bringing together the World Bank Group, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), UNCTAD and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Furthermore, 29 bilateral investment treaties were signed with developed and other developing countries, thus paving the way for increased FDI flows and economic cooperation.

11. Other initiatives were announced on the occasion of the Conference. For example:

(a) An Investment Advisory Council for Least Developed Countries was established with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) comprising senior business executives and political leaders from least developed countries;

(b) An inter-agency initiative (including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO), the World Trade Organization and UNIDO) was announced to establish a trust fund facility (with a target of $100 million) to support the upgrading of least developed countries' food safety and quality assurance capabilities;

(c) EU member States endorsed a five-year Programme of Action to fight communicable diseases that severely affect least developed countries and agreed on a pricing mechanism for key pharmaceuticals. The European Commission (EC) decided to completely untie EC drug procurement from other forms of development aid;

(d) Some countries (including Japan, Ireland and Norway) indicated their intention to contribute to the Trust Fund of the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance. The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will also make financial contributions to the Trust Fund;

(e) At the eighth World Summit of Young Entrepreneurs, held on the occasion of the Conference, the World Trade University was launched to serve as an institution of higher learning that would be affordable and accessible for entrepreneurs and policy makers, including from least developed countries, with strong support for the private sector.

12. One of the most important initiatives was reflected in the fact that 46 (out of 49) least developed countries prepared and put forward National Programmes of Action[4] committing themselves to a wide range of policy actions and support of poverty eradication. The least developed countries have thus demonstrated ownership of the process and the determination to make good on their promises. Much work will be needed at the national level to transform the National Programmes of Action into real instruments for national development planning, linking them with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process and ensuring that the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the World Bank and the major bilateral donors act in a coordinated fashion at the national level, and in a manner that is consistent with the commitments made in the global Programme of Action.

13. The implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action, the deliverables and the several initiatives launched at the Conference are of immense significance. It is now incumbent on the least developed countries, all organizations and agencies of the United Nations system that played a lead role during the preparatory process for the Conference, and the development partners to hold to and implement those outcomes of the Conference.

A. Brussels Declaration

14. In the Brussels Declaration, participants in the Conference declared their commitment to eradicating poverty and improving the quality of lives of people in least developed countries by strengthening their abilities to build a better future for themselves and develop their countries. While it was recognized that the primary responsibility for development in least developed countries rested with the least developed countries themselves, the Brussels Declaration acknowledged that their efforts needed to be given concrete and substantial international support from Governments and international organizations in a spirit of shared responsibility through genuine partnerships, inter alia, with the civil society and the private sector. Participants in the Conference were particularly concerned by the acute threat of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic, and emphasized the need for the strongest possible measures to combat this and other communicable diseases, particularly tuberculosis and malaria. They declared their commitment to seizing the opportunity of the fourth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001, to advance the development dimension of trade, in particular for the development of least developed countries. Furthermore, they declared that they were aiming at improving preferential market access for least developed countries by working towards the objective of duty-free and quota-free market access for all least developed countries' products in the markets of developed countries. While recognizing that the most important financing of development came from domestic resources, and that FDI was also an important source of capital, know-how, employment and trade opportunities for least developed countries, participants affirmed that official development assistance (ODA) had a critical role to play in support of development of least developed countries. They took it upon themselves not to spare any effort towards reversing the declining trends of ODA and to meet expeditiously the targets of 0.15 or 0.20 per cent of gross national product (GNP) as ODA to least developed countries.

They also undertook to improve aid effectiveness and to implement the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) recommendation on untying ODA to least developed countries. Participants affirmed their commitment to providing the full financing and speedy and effective implementation of the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which is essential for freeing domestic budgetary resources for poverty reduction, and they undertook to make expeditious progress towards full cancellation of outstanding official bilateral debt within the context of the Enhanced HIPC Initiative.

B. Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

1. A Framework for Partnership

15. The Framework for Partnership (A/CONF.191/11, chap. II) is based on mutual commitments by least developed countries and their development partners to undertaking concrete actions in a number of interlinked areas set out in the Programme of Action. This framework is entered into in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and with full respect for national sovereignty. The partnership is to be nurtured and strengthened by mutual collaboration of partners through relevant international forums and processes. While least developed countries should assume ownership of designing and formulating appropriate national policies of their own will and choice so as to create conditions conducive to development, and continue to have the primary responsibility for effective implementation of those policies and measures, the full implementation of the Programme of Action is the shared responsibility of these countries and their development partners. It was recognized that the strengthened partnership for development necessitated adequate external support from the least developed countries' development partners. Each least developed country is to translate national policies and measures in the Programme of Action into concrete measures within the framework of its national programme of action, taking into account its particular circumstances and priorities. The development partners are to assist in the implementation of the Programme of Action through the commitments undertaken therein in a spirit of genuine solidarity and shared responsibility. An important function of the Programme of Action is to serve as a common framework for development.

16. The Programme of Action calls for the prevailing of a new spirit of international cooperation, based on the principle of getting common benefits, but also on the common, but differentiated responsibilities of developing and developed countries. It recognizes the important role that Governments, as well as civil society and the private sector, have to play in the implementation and follow-up, inter alia, through stronger public-private partnerships. The Programme of Action also outlines a number of considerations to guide the least developed countries and their partners in its implementation.

Commitment 1: Fostering a people-centred policy framework

17. The Programme of Action states that the objective of the policy framework is to create an overall enabling environment for national and international actions to eradicate poverty and overcome the structural bottlenecks in the least developed countries and ultimately to put least developed countries on a path of accelerated growth and sustainable development that provides opportunities for all, particularly the poorest, and enables these countries to integrate beneficially into the global economy based on the principle that human beings are at the centre of the concerns for sustainable development.

18. The Programme of Action underscores that for a poverty eradication strategy to be effective it should aim at strengthening physical, social and human capacities, including through equal access to production resources and social, health and education services. It delineates a number of actions to be undertaken by least developed countries and the development partners. Least developed countries agreed to support initiatives that help empower people living in poverty, build on successful policy reforms and continuing efforts towards sound economic management with a view to attaining levels of economic growth necessary for reaching the objectives of the Programme of Action, and promote an equitable distribution of the benefits of growth and development in favour of the poor and improve their access to basic social services with a view to increasing their opportunities for participation in economic activity.

19. Development partners committed to facilitating an external environment supportive of full and timely realization of the objectives of the Programme of Action through the increasing involvement of least developed countries in the work relating to their development strategies in the international financial institutions and other multilateral organizations, extending substantial and more effective support for least developed countries' efforts in areas of empowering people living in poverty and ensuring their access to basic social services, assisting least developed countries' efforts, through providing financial and other resources, in setting up effective social safety nets to mitigate social exclusion, insecurity and vulnerability of least developed countries, creating an enabling environment that would help the least developed countries derive benefits from globalization, and supporting them in mitigating its negative consequences, in the area of human and institutional capacity-building, designing and providing donor support programmes to genuinely strengthen least developed countries' national capacities and not replace them, and supporting least developed countries' efforts in bridging the digital divide, bearing in mind the need for diffusion and transfer of technology.

Commitment 2: Good governance at national and international levels

20. The Programme of Action emphasizes that success in meeting the objectives of development and poverty eradication depends, inter alia, on good governance within each country. It also depends on good governance at the international level and on transparency in the financial, monetary and trading systems. Participants in the Conference committed themselves to an open, equitable, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial system. They pledged that no effort would be spared to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

21. The Programme of Action acknowledged that successful implementation of the objectives, policies, commitments and measures contained in the Programme of Action would require, at the national level, among other things, that these be supported by good governance through transparent, accountable, and efficient institutions and practices within the Government, the private sector and civil society. It recognized that promoting good governance in least developed countries needed to be approached with a long-term view and supported by the international community. It was also agreed that governance issues at the international level and international economic decision-making processes that affected least developed countries' development, including issues of their effective participation, should be addressed.

Commitment 3: Building human and institutional capacities

22. The Programme of Action outlines a number of actions by least developed countries and the development partners in the areas of social infrastructure and social service delivery; population; education and training; health, nutrition and sanitation; and social integration. It calls for the implementation of the 20/20 initiative on the basis of mutual agreement and commitment by donors and least developed countries, and recognizes that this initiative is important in mobilizing new and additional resources, both from domestic and from external sources, with a view to facilitating universal access to basic social services.

23. In the area of social infrastructure and social service delivery, while least developed countries are to make increasing budgetary allocations in favour of social infrastructure and basic social services and create an efficient environment for and enhance the effectiveness of social sector investment, development partners are to make determined efforts to increase ODA in support of least developed countries' efforts towards provision of social infrastructure and social services, in order to reach the United Nations social targets in the Programme of Action.

24. As regards population, the Programme of Action outlines a number of goals, targets and actions to be pursued during the decade in conformity with the Programme of Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development[5] and the outcome of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly.[6] In the area of education and training, policies and measures are to be pursued in line with the Dakar Framework for Action.[7]

25. As regards health, nutrition and sanitation, the Programme of Action states that policies and measures are to be pursued in line with the Programme of Action

of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Rome Declaration on World Food Security,[8] the United Nations Millennium Declaration,[9] and General Assembly resolution S-24/2 on further initiatives for social development. With respect to social integration, the Programme of Action calls for actions by least developed countries and their partners, including promoting greater social integration and strengthening, where appropriate, mechanisms for the participation and protection of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons. It calls for measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families, to eliminate the increasing acts of racism and xenophobia in many societies and to promote greater harmony and tolerance in all societies.

Commitment 4: Building productive capacities to make globalization work for least developed countries

26. The Programme of Action identifies a number of goals and targets to be pursued, in accordance with national development policies and strategies. A paramount objective of the actions by least developed countries and their development partners is to continue to strengthen productive capacities by overcoming structural constraints. Access to finance by way of domestic resource mobilization, FDI and increased ODA resources were considered critical in this regard.

27. As regards physical infrastructure, development partners committed to supporting infrastructure development, both through public investment and by facilitating private investment, and particularly for the creation of essential infrastructure to facilitate the functioning of liberalized domestic and regional markets. They also committed to providing technical support and private sector guarantees to support infrastructural programmes facilitating bilateral, subregional and regional complementarities.

28. Concerning technology, the Programme of Action states that the transfer and diffusion of technology by transnational corporations could be promoted by conducive policies, regulatory transparency, market liberalization and improved absorptive capacity of local enterprises and by addressing the problems of the high cost of technology and financial constraints. It recognizes that research and development, including, inter alia, through the private sector, have a strategic role to play in strengthening know-how and building the necessary special knowledge base in least developed countries to prevent a widening digital divide.

29. The Programme of Action acknowledges that the private sector can play a crucial role in poverty eradication by contributing to economic growth and creating employment. Specific attention should be given to the needs of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, including enterprises owned by female entrepreneurs, and to the development of a sustainable financial sector.

30. The Programme of Action notes that the levels of production and consumption of energy in the majority of least developed countries are inadequate and unstable. It highlights that access to energy, transport and communication systems at affordable prices is important to sustainable development and poverty eradication. While domestic public investments have a positive role to play, in view of scarcities of domestic resources in least developed countries, the Programme of Action recognizes that it will also be important to mobilize external capital, including ODA and FDI. Development partners committed to supporting the least developed countries in their development of energy resources, including renewable energy, natural gas and other clean energy sources, and to facilitating the transfer of technology for the development of clean energy technologies in accordance with relevant international agreements.

31. Agriculture was identified as the pivotal sector in the least developed countries, as it underpins food security, foreign exchange earnings, industrial and rural development, and employment generation. The Programme of Action calls upon least developed countries and their partners to pursue further reforms, taking into account the developmental concerns of least developed countries, to improve the productive capacity of agriculture and fisheries, to enhance productivity and competitiveness, to diversify exports and to move up the value chain in the processing and export of agricultural products. The least developed countries committed to increasing public and private investments in agriculture and programmes for rural economic and social infrastructure, increasing the access of the poor, particularly women, to support services and production resources, and encouraging structural adaptations in production, processing and marketing systems. Development partners agreed to provide support for least developed countries'

undertakings to improve agricultural productivity and increase competitiveness, inter alia, through ODA and increased FDI, facilitate access of least developed countries to appropriate agricultural technologies and practices, and support the development and expansion of social services and physical infrastructure to augment agricultural production.

32. The Programme of Action notes that lack of food security is the most typical face of poverty for both urban and rural people in least developed countries. It calls for making food and nutritional security part of a larger framework of sustainable rural development and of poverty eradication. It calls for making all efforts towards advanced implementation of the target of the World Food Summit to reduce by half the number of undernourished people by 2015. It calls for addressing the high rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence in rural areas, which is having devastating effects on agricultural productivity and food security. While least developed countries agreed to take a number of actions including reviewing and revising, as appropriate, their national plans, programmes and strategies with a view to achieving food security and rural development, development partners agreed to support these efforts and provide support to programmes and initiatives in least developed countries, inter alia, through ODA to improve rural credit facilities and enhance investment in rural investment economic and social infrastructure.

33. The Programme of Action considers manufacturing critical to the pursuit of sustained growth in the least developed countries because of their potential to enhance technological capacities, advance the diversification of production and exports, add value to exports, and foster intersectoral and inter-industry linkages. Development partners agreed to support least developed countries' efforts to increase public and private investment, and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies on favourable terms, and provide technical support for geologic mapping and compilation of basic data on local mineral potential, product adaptation and market studies for small- and medium-scale mines, as well as acquisition of new technologies.

34. The Programme of Action views international tourism as one of the few economic sectors through which least developed countries have managed to increase their participation in the global economy. It can be an engine of employment creation, poverty eradication, ensuring gender equality, and protection of the natural and cultural heritage. Development partners agreed to support least developed countries' efforts to encourage investment in the tourism industry and enterprise development in the wider tourism economy.

Commitment 5: Enhancing the role of trade in development

35. This part of the Programme of Action dealing with enhancing the role of trade in development notes that the participation of least developed countries in international trade is severely limited by a number of factors, in particular demand- and supply-side constraints, as well as unfavourable market access conditions in markets affecting the products of greatest export interest to them, which largely explain their marginal share of 0.4 per cent of world trade in 1998. It recognizes that coping with increased global market competitiveness also presents an important and great policy challenge to least developed countries, and how they respond to it will be decisive in their success in regional and global integration strategies. It calls for concrete action by the least developed countries themselves, as well as their development partners, in order to overcome these constraints and transform trade into a powerful engine for growth and poverty eradication, as well as an effective instrument for drawing benefits from globalization and trade liberalization. Coherent actions by the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization along with the actions of Governments are seen as an essential element of overall policy reform

36. The actions to be undertaken by least developed countries focus, inter alia, on: strengthening efforts to integrate trade policies into national development policies towards poverty eradication, improving economic openness and policy predictability, as well as sound macroeconomic policy, and developing human and institutional capacities for effective and informed participation in the multilateral trading system and for effective negotiations on trade, finance, technology transfer and related areas.

37. Development partners agreed that they would aim, including through actions within relevant multilateral forums, inter alia, at: assisting least developed countries in capacity-building in trade policy and related areas, in developing human and institutional capacities for effective negotiations and informed participation in the multilateral trading

system in order that least developed countries might reap maximum benefits from it, and in intensifying horizontal and vertical diversification, including local processing of primary commodities, and providing financial, technical and/or other forms of assistance in support of least developed countries' efforts to improve their transport infrastructure.

38. On market access, agreement was reached to improve preferential access for least developed countries by working towards the objective of duty-free and quota-free market access for all least developed countries' products. It was agreed that improvements in market access for least developed countries should be granted on a secure and predictable basis. They should be combined with simplified rules of origin that provide transparency and predictability so as to help ensure that least developed countries benefit from the market access granted, and multi-donor programmes, to upgrade least developed countries' production and export capacities and capabilities. Consideration is also to be given to proposals for developing countries to contribute to improved market access for least developed countries' exports.

39. This part of the Programme of Action furthermore deals with special and differential treatment, accession to the World Trade Organization, international standard-setting and quality control, commodities services and reducing the impact of external economic shocks. Development partners agreed to implement in full and as a matter of priority the special and differential measures in favour of least developed countries as contained in the Final Act Embodying the Results of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations[10] and to consider new measures for least developed countries as part of future multilateral trade negotiations. They agreed on making the World Trade Organization accession process for least developed countries more effective and less onerous, and tailoring it to their specific economic conditions. This is of particular importance in view of the fact that not a single least developed country has managed to accede to the World Trade Organization since it was founded. Given the attention being paid to international norms for products entering trade, it was an important step that development partners committed to providing assistance to least developed countries in developing infrastructure to ensure quality control and conformity to international standards of their products and to avoiding taking unilateral action in a manner inconsistent with the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the World Trade Organization.

40. As regards commodities, development partners agreed to support capacity-building in the areas of research and development, production, processing and marketing of commodities, to support diversification programmes in least developed countries, to continue to provide technical and financial support to enhance the productive capacities of least developed countries, and to continue to provide compensatory financing in order to mitigate adverse consequences of commodity price volatility on least developed countries' economies. As regards services, development partners agreed to support, through financial, technical and/or other forms of assistance, individual least developed countries' efforts to develop the infrastructure for tradable services in which they had a comparative advantage, and remove restrictions and enhance market access opportunities for services from least developed countries, as provided for in relevant World Trade Organization agreements, in areas of export interest to them.

41. Participants in the Conference recognized that the least developed countries are structurally more exposed than most other developing countries to external economic shock. The least developed countries committed to pursuing balance policies that sought to limit transmission of external shock into the domestic economy while promoting gradual liberalization, and developing safety nets to protect the poor and vulnerable segments of the population against the consequences of external shocks. Development partners agreed to pursue policies that aimed at minimizing the risks of adverse external economic shocks and promote a more predictable and stable international economic environment. They also agreed to continue to provide contingency and short-term emergency financial assistance with a view to assisting least developed countries in coping with the consequences of serious external shocks.

Commitment 6: Reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment

42. As regards reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment, the Programme of Action recognizes that long-term threats to the global environment are a common concern of all countries, and there is an urgent need to address this issue on the basis of the principle

of common but differentiated responsibility. The least developed countries are acutely vulnerable to a variety of natural shocks. With respect to protecting the environment, it was agreed that LDC-specific objectives defined in Agenda 21[11] and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 adopted by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session,[12] as well as commitments from multilateral environmental agreements, must be the basis for the actions by least developed countries and their development partners outlined in the Programme of Action.

43. As regards alleviating vulnerability to natural shocks, the Programme of Action states that post-emergency action, using effective and flexible mechanisms, must ease the transition from the emergency phase to the development phase, promote the socio-economic reintegration of the parts of the population affected, remove as far as possible the causes of the crisis, and strengthen institutions and ownership by local and national actors of their role in formulating a sustainable development policy. Both least developed countries and development partners should encourage the involvement of the private sector, inter alia, in the areas of disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness.

Commitment 7: Mobilizing financial resources

44. The question of mobilizing financial resources was one of the key issues before the Conference. Under this commitment, issues relating to domestic resources mobilization, aid and its effectiveness, external debt, and FDI and other private external flows were addressed. It was acknowledged that the large investment requirements of least developed countries and the very limited scope, in the foreseeable future, to meet the multiple development finance requirements with domestic resources, implied a need for new and additional resources and efforts to increase ODA to least developed countries supportive of national programmes of action, including poverty eradication strategies.

45. It was recognized that the key to increasing domestic resource mobilization and reducing dependence on external finance lies in achieving a firm structural basis, which would sustain high per capita growth rates. Least developed countries agreed to take the necessary measures to stimulate domestic savings, with the goal of increasing domestic saving rates, develop efficient and appropriate financial systems and improve the efficiency and equity of tax collection systems. Development partners committed to supporting least developed countries' efforts to ensure that aid and debt-relief measures supported rather than undermined domestic resource mobilization efforts, and promoting mechanisms through which domestic resource mobilization in least developed countries could be enhanced by making use of aid resources.

46. As regards aid and its effectiveness, it was regarded as essential to consider fully both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of aid and the effective coordination of this aid. An essential condition for achieving this objective and reducing aid dependency in least developed countries was considered to be the improvement of aid volumes and aid effectiveness.

47. Least developed countries agreed to set up, in the context of national development strategies, the necessary public sector auditing and accounting systems, coherent budgets and medium-term expenditure plans; integrate and coordinate aid within national plans and priorities and enhance administrative capacity; design, implement and regularly update national development strategies through dialogue between government and national stakeholders to enhance national policy ownership; identify sectors where ODA could have the most significant catalytic effect on efforts to eradicate poverty; and foster sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

48. Donor countries agreed to implement the actions that they had committed to at the second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries as soon as possible, as follows. Those donor countries providing more than 0.20 per cent of their GNP as ODA to least developed countries would continue to do so and increase their efforts. Other donor countries that had met the 0.15 per cent target would undertake to reach 0.20 per cent expeditiously. All other donor countries that had committed themselves to the 0.15 per cent target reaffirmed their commitment and would undertake either to achieve the target within the next five years or to make their best efforts to accelerate their endeavours to reach the target. During the period of the Programme of Action, the other donor countries would exercise individual best efforts to increase their ODA to least developed countries with the effect that collectively their assistance to LDCs would

significantly increase. Some donor countries announced at the Conference that they had either met or surpassed the above ODA targets, while other donors reiterated their intention to continue to increase aid to least developed countries.

49. An important feature of the outcome of the Conference in this area was the agreement by donors to implement the OECD/DAC recommendation to untie aid to least developed countries, which will significantly increase the value of aid in an expeditious manner as agreed in OECD in May 2001 and improve aid transparency through internal reviews and OECD/DAC peer reviews. These reviews may examine indicators to capture the quality as well as the quantity of the assistance.

50. The Programme of Action recognizes that the external debt overhang in the majority of least developed countries constitutes a serious obstacle to their development efforts and economic growth. It calls for a comprehensive solution to the serious debt problems of least developed countries, including the full, speedy and effective implementation of the enhanced HIPC Initiative and other debt-relief measures, measures to address structural causes of indebtedness, and provision of ODA, with a view to ensuring that these countries do not fall back into arrears. The Conference welcomed the steps taken by the donor community, particularly by members of the Paris Club and other bilateral creditors, to address external debt problems, including a moratorium on debt-service payments by least developed countries.

51. On their part, the debtor least developed countries will aim at maximizing benefits from debt relief by creating a conducive national framework including fiscal reforms, a budgetary framework, sectoral adjustments, contributing to poverty eradication and faster economic growth, export growth, increased investment, enhanced productive capacities, employment and productivity, savings and international competitiveness.

52. Development partners agreed to effectively implement the enhanced HIPC Initiative and provide adequate financial resources expeditiously for the speedy and full implementation of the enhanced HIPC Initiative, and provide new and additional resources necessary to fulfil the future financial requirements of the Enhanced HIPC Initiative, on the basis of fair and equitable burden-sharing. The Conference encouraged non-Paris Club official creditors to participate in debt-relief measures to assist least developed countries. Development partners agreed to make expeditious progress towards full cancellation, in the context of the Enhanced HIPC Initiative, of outstanding official bilateral debt owed by HIPC least developed countries. Furthermore, they agreed to implement the enhanced programme of debt relief for the heavily indebted poor countries without further delay and agreed to cancel all official bilateral debts of those countries in return for their making demonstrable commitments to poverty eradication. They agreed to write off multilateral debt in the context of the enhanced HIPC for least developed countries that were HIPCs and mobilize sufficient resources for this purpose, and provide debt relief to post-conflict countries under the Enhanced HIPC Initiative as soon as possible, within the flexibility provided under the HIPC framework.

53. A number of countries (for example, Italy, Norway and Sweden) announced their intention to provide more than their original contribution to the HIPC debt-relief programme. Other countries, including Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan and the Netherlands, reiterated their commitment to supporting the HIPC Trust Fund. Some developing countries, for example, Brazil, China and Saudi Arabia, informed the Conference of debt-relief measures they had undertaken in favour of least developed countries. EU announced that, to mark the occasion of the Conference, and in addition to its cancellation of 1 billion euros of least developed countries' debt last year, it had decided to forgo payments on all outstanding least developed countries' obligations arising from special loans provided under earlier Lomé Conventions.

54. As regards FDI and other private external flows, the Programme of Action recognizes that a stable economic, legal and institutional framework is crucial in order to attract foreign investment and to promote sustainable development through investment. In this regard, a conducive international financial environment was considered to be crucial. The promotion of a conducive macroeconomic environment, good governance and democracy, as well as strengthening structural aspects of the economy and improved institutional and human capacities, was regarded as important also in the context of attracting FDI and other private external flows. Development partners would need to provide a range of support measures,

complementing least developed countries' efforts to attract FDI.

2. Arrangements for implementation, follow-up and monitoring and review

55. The Programme of Action emphasizes that success in attaining its objectives will depend critically on the effective functioning of the arrangements for its implementation, follow-up, monitoring and review at the national, regional and global levels. It was agreed that follow-up, monitoring and review of the Programme of Action along the above tracks should involve all relevant stakeholders. They should be conducted in a coherent and mutually supportive manner. Consequently, well-functioning linkages should be built among different levels of follow-up. Through these processes, the actions identified in the Programme of Action are to be regularly adapted to new and evolving developments.

56. The follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action are to contribute to coordinated follow-up of the implementation of recommendations and commitments of global summits and conferences, including their major reviews, and the United Nations Millennium Declaration, as well as of other major agreements and initiatives on development as they relate to least developed countries.

57. The Programme of Action acknowledged the special role of the organizations of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in its implementation. It calls for appropriately utilizing experience, expertise and resources of the system, including at the field level, for this purpose. The efforts at the country level by the United Nations system organizations, in particular within the framework of the Resident Coordinator system, to help least developed countries translate goals and targets of major global conferences and summits into concrete actions in the light of national priorities, provide an opportunity for the promotion of an effective follow-up to the commitments of the Programme of Action.

58. The implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action at the national level were considered to be of primary importance. The Governments of least developed countries are to undertake the implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action within their respective national development frameworks and poverty eradication strategies, including, where they exist, PRSPs, common country assessments (CCAs) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and with the involvement of civil society, including the private sector, on the basis of a broad-based inclusive dialogue. The development partners agreed to support the objectives and policies designed by least developed countries on the basis of the Programme of Action and existing national development and cooperation frameworks. On the basis of each least developed country's commitment to these long-term policy frameworks and plans, development partners agreed to commit to extending adequate support for their implementation, including financial and technical support.

59. It was agreed that the existing country review mechanisms such as the World Bank's consultative group and UNDP's round-table meetings should continue as principal coordination forums for development cooperation, as well as for mobilizing external development resources for least developed countries, based on national development frameworks. These mechanisms should be strengthened and organized on a more systematic basis and should cover all least developed countries. They should be broadened so as to encompass all donors.

60. As regards subregional and regional follow-up, the relevant United Nations regional commissions were invited to undertake, in close coordination with the global-level and country-level follow-up processes and in cooperation with subregional and regional development banks and subregional and regional intergovernmental organizations, periodic subregional and regional monitoring and review of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action. They should offer an opportunity for least developed countries of their respective regions, together with neighbouring developing countries as well as other countries in the same region, to exchange experiences and seek solutions to common development problems at the national, subregional, regional and global levels.

61. Arrangements for monitoring, follow-up and review at the global level are considered an integral part of the overall process, being all complementary and supportive to the above-mentioned arrangements at the country, subregional and regional levels.

62. It was agreed that the General Assembly should monitor the implementation of the Programme of

Action under a specific item in its agenda. In this respect, substantive preparations for, as well as review and monitoring of, the implementation of the Programme of Action should be carried out by relevant bodies of the United Nations system, and consideration should be given to strengthening coordination of actions of the United Nations system for the implementation of the Programme of Action under the aegis of the Economic and Social Council.

63. The Economic and Social Council was invited to consider for final decision by the General Assembly: (a) the creation of an annual agenda item on the review and coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries, allocated to its coordination segment; (b) the examination at regular intervals of this review and coordination at its high-level segment; and (c) the undertaking of effective preparations for this annual review by the Council, bearing in mind the established procedures of the Council for such preparation, as well as drawing on the contribution of governmental and individual experts.

64. Consideration of each annual review is to focus on: (a) follow-up, monitoring and assessment of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action at national, subregional, regional and global levels through reporting by Governments, as well as by the secretariats and intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system and of other relevant subregional, regional and international organizations and institutions, on the implementation of the Programme of Action on least developed countries; (b) fostering international cooperation in support of the Programme of Action, including coordination among donors and among organizations referred to above; and (c) elaborating new policies and measures in light of changing domestic and external circumstances facing least developed countries.

65. The governing bodies of the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other multilateral organizations, were invited to mainstream the implementation of the Programme of Action within their programmes of work, as well as into their intergovernmental processes. It was agreed that the existing intergovernmental processes of these organizations, such as the sessional committee of the Trade and Development Board and the World Trade Organization's Subcommittee on Least Developed Countries, should continue. In particular, the Trade and Development Board was invited to consider converting its Sessional Committee on least developed countries into a standing committee in order to address, within the mandate of the Board, substantive issues relating to the implementation of the Programme of Action. These governing bodies are also invited to bring to the attention of the Economic and Social Council progress made by their respective organizations in implementing this Programme of Action.

66. The General Assembly was invited to consider conducting a comprehensive review of the Programme of Action at a moment to be decided upon. The Assembly, towards the end of the decade, is also invited to consider holding a fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in order to make a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of this Programme of Action and to decide on subsequent action.

67. The Programme of Action acknowledged the critical need for an effective mechanism to support intergovernmental review and follow-up of the implementation of the Programme of Action; to mobilize the United Nations system organizations, as well as other relevant multilateral organizations; and to facilitate substantive least developed countries participation in appropriate multilateral forums.

68. The Secretary-General of the United Nations was requested to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session his recommendations for an efficient and highly visible follow-up mechanism, including the possibility of transforming the current Office of the Special Coordinator for Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries into an Office of the High Representative for Least Developed, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

C. Other issues

69. The Conference adopted a resolution expressing its profound gratitude to EU for hosting the Conference at the European Parliament in Brussels and acknowledging with deep appreciation the contribution made to the Conference by the European Commission and the Government of Belgium. The Conference expressed particular appreciation to His Majesty King Albert II for his gracious presence at the opening of the Conference. It conveyed appreciation to the European

Parliament for providing the setting for the Conference and thereby instilling an atmosphere conducive to success. It thanked the people of Belgium for the warm hospitality shown to all participants.

III. Preparatory process for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

70. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries was preceded by a comprehensive preparatory process, in which Governments, both from the least developed countries themselves and from other member States, the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, took an active part. The account provided below supplies additional information and brings up to date the report of the Secretary-General on the state of preparations for the Conference (A/55/222), submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

A. Intergovernmental preparatory meetings

71. In its resolution 52/187, the General Assembly decided to convene, in order to prepare for the Conference, an intergovernmental preparatory committee in due time. In its resolution 53/182, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to organize the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee in two parts. In its resolution 54/235, the Assembly decided that the meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee should be held in New York in two parts in the third quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2001, each for five working days.

72. The first session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Conference was held at United Nations Headquarters from 24 to 28 July 2000.[13] The Committee considered the substantive and organizational aspects of the preparatory process and the Conference itself. The Committee recommended to the Conference the draft provisional agenda and provisional rules of procedures of the Conference. It endorsed the design and structure of the Conference as presented by the Conference secretariat. The Committee further agreed that on the basis of the outcome of its first session and other relevant inputs, the Conference secretariat would prepare a draft annotated outline of the new Programme of Action to be reviewed by the Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD at its forty-seventh session. The Committee also agreed on the steps for the preparation and consideration of the draft Programme of Action by its second session.

73. At its forty-seventh session, the Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD reviewed the annotated outline of the Programme of Action and requested that the work on the preparation of the draft Programme of Action commence immediately under the authority of the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee. It recommended that in preparing the new Programme of Action, account should be taken of the views of the member States, particularly the least developed countries, the national programmes of action, the outcome of the major global summits and conferences, and ongoing processes within multilateral organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization.

74. The second session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee, held in New York from 5 to 9 February 2001,[14] in light of the recommendation of the Committee at its first session and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/214, undertook the first formal reading of the draft Programme of Action. The Committee decided that it would be desirable for inter-sessional negotiations to be held prior to its third session in order to make progress in finalizing the draft Programme of Action on the basis of proposed amendments to the draft. The Committee established two clusters to carry out the inter-sessional work.

75. The third session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee was held, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/214, in New York from 2 to 6 April 2001.[15] At its first preliminary meeting, on 2 April 2001, the Committee decided that the two clusters that had worked on the draft Programme of Action during the inter-sessional negotiations should pursue their work and report back to the Committee. The Committee pursued its work in informal meetings. At its closing preliminary meeting, on 6 April 2001, the Committee agreed to transmit the draft Programme of Action to the Conference for finalization by the Committee of the Whole. The

Chairperson of the Committee informed the Committee that he would invite the Chairpersons of the two clusters and their friends for a meeting just prior to the Conference to exchange views and review the draft Programme of Action with a view to advancing in the consensus. The meetings of the two clusters and the consultations of the Chairperson of the Committee were held in Brussels from 9 to 11 May 2001.

76. The draft Programme of Action, prepared by the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee at its meetings and during the inter-sessional period, served as the basis for negotiations at the Conference in Brussels.

B. Mobilization and coordination of organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system

77. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolutions 53/182, 54/235 and 55/214, the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Conference, convened inter-agency consultations to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the preparations for the Conference and in the Conference itself. In this context, the first and second inter-agency consultations were held in Geneva on 20 July 1999 and 10 April 2000,[16] respectively. The third inter-agency consultation was held in New York, on the occasion of the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee, on 20 July 2000.[17] The fourth and fifth inter-agency consultations were also held in New York, on 2 February 2001 and 30 March 2001, respectively, and the final inter-agency consultation was held in Geneva on 23 April 2001. Organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization participated actively in the above-mentioned consultations and also contributed to the preparatory process for the Conference, inter alia, through participating in other preparatory activities organized by the Conference secretariat.

78. As requested by the General Assembly, the Administrator of UNDP, in his capacity as convener of the United Nations Development Group, mobilized the United Nations Resident Coordinators and country teams in the least developed countries to ensure their effective contribution to the preparations for the Conference at the country level.

79. The preparatory process for the Conference figured prominently in the agenda of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in its meetings in New York and Nairobi on 27 and 28 October 2000, and on 2 and 3 April 2001, respectively. ACC declared the full commitment of the organizations individually, and the United Nations system collectively, to strongly supporting the Conference secretariat in the preparations for the Conference. On behalf of the entire system, it expressed the readiness of the organizations to advance the objectives of the Conference with a view to accelerating growth and development and the eradication of poverty in the least developed countries. It also recognized that a decent standard of living, adequate nutrition, health care, decent work and protection against calamities are not just development goals — they are also human rights. ACC pledged to mobilize all parts of the United Nations system to work in partnership with all stakeholders, including policy makers in least developed countries and their development partners, to make globalization work for least developed countries by supporting the least developed countries' efforts to build the requisite productive, human and institutional capacities, as well as by helping to create a conducive international environment for their beneficial integration into the world economy, and to ensure sustainable development of the least developed countries and of their citizens by promoting good governance, respect for human rights including protection of the most vulnerable, and protection of the common environment.

80. The following organizations acted as lead agencies for the organization of the interactive thematic sessions: UNDP (Governance, peace and social stability), FAO (Enhancing productive capacities: the agricultural sector and food security), the World Health Organization (WHO) (Enhancing productive capacities: the role of health), UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization (International trade, commodities and services), UNCTAD (Enhancing productive capacities: the role of investment and enterprise development), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Education), UNIDO (Energy), the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Human resources development and employment), the World

Bank (Infrastructure development), UNCTAD (Transport), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) (Intellectual property and development: an instrument for wealth creation) and OECD/DAC and the World Bank (Financing growth and development).

81. The following organizations acted as lead agencies for the preparation and organization of the following parallel events in cooperation with the Conference secretariat: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)/European Parliament (High-level Parliamentarians Round Table), UNDP/United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (Meeting of Mayors: "City-to-City Cooperation"), International Organization for Migration (IOM)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Migration/Refugees Round Table), International Trade Centre (ITC) (Business Sector Round Table), ITC (Young Entrepreneurs), UNCTAD (Digital Economy), UNCTAD (Youth Forum) and UNCTAD (Women Entrepreneurs Forum).

C. High-level Panel on the assessment of the progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s

82. The Secretary-General of the Conference established a High-level Panel to undertake an assessment of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries for the 1990s. The Panel members visited a number of least developed countries to gather first-hand perceptions of the Programme of Action by all the stakeholders. The Panel held three meetings, one in Geneva in June 2000 and two in New York in July and September 2000. The Chairperson of the High-level Panel briefed the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee on the preliminary findings of the Panel. The final report[18] of the Panel was submitted to the Committee at its second session and to the Conference.

D. The Consultative Forum on the preparatory process for the Conference

83. The Secretary-General of the Conference established the Consultative Forum on the preparatory process for the Conference. The main function of the forum was to provide an opportunity for the least developed countries, their development partners, United Nations organizations and agencies, civil society and the business community to exchange views on the conceptual framework for the Conference, and its objectives and organizational aspects as well as the intergovernmental preparatory process. The first and second meetings of the Forum were held in Geneva on 21 and 22 July 1999 and 11 April 2000, respectively. The third meeting of the Forum was held on 21 July 2000 on the occasion of the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee. The reports[19] of the meetings of the Consultative Forum were presented to the meetings of the Committee and the Conference.

E. Preparations at the regional level

84. Preparations for the Conference at the regional level were undertaken by the relevant regional commissions in cooperation with UNCTAD. The joint Conference of African Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Economic Development and Planning, held in Addis Ababa in May 1999, addressed issues of importance to the African least developed countries. The Conference adopted a resolution on the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in which the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was requested to provide support to the African least developed countries in their preparation for the Conference at the country, regional and global levels. ECA organized, in Addis Ababa, from 15 to 17 November 2000, a special event, at the ministerial level, on the substantive issues before the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The meeting adopted a declaration, which was made available to the meetings of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organized an intergovernmental regional conference in Dhaka from 13 to 15 November 2000 in which representatives from least developed countries, developed and developing countries and international organizations participated. The fifth session of ESCAP's Special Body on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries, which was held in Bangkok on 20 and 21 February 2001, reviewed the implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries for the 1990s, identified

common issues and future challenges facing least developed countries and proposed recommendations to address these concerns.[20] UNCTAD, in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized, in Sana'a, Yemen, on 9 November 2000, a regional meeting for Arab least developed countries. The meeting provided an opportunity for participants to exchange views on the preparatory process for the Conference at the global and regional levels and, in particular, the preparation of country-level programmes of action.

85. The regional commissions also provided support to the least developed countries in the preparation of the country programmes of action.

F. Participation of the least developed countries in the preparatory process

86. At the invitation of the Secretary-General of the Conference, the Governments of the least developed countries established national preparatory committees, with the participation of representatives from the public sector and civil society, including the private sector, to formulate and present to the Conference national programmes of action. Such programmes of action were prepared and submitted by 46 least developed countries. The national programmes of action identified the difficulties and constraints faced by least developed countries and the required national and international support measures to eradicate poverty, overcome the structural bottlenecks in least developed countries and put these countries on the path of accelerated growth and sustainable development. Those national programmes of action were made available to the meetings of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee and to the Conference itself.

87. Furthermore, as part of the preparations for the Conference, the least developed countries met at the ministerial level in New York on 29 September 1999, and 18 September 2000, and in Bangkok on 13 February 2001 on the occasion of the tenth session of UNCTAD. The Ministers of the least developed countries also met in Havana on 14 April 2000 on the occasion of the South Summit. Just prior to the Conference, the Ministers of the least developed countries met in Brussels on 13 May 2001 and adopted a Declaration[21] in which they stressed that while the primary responsibility for the development of least developed countries rested with these countries themselves, the amelioration of the worsening social economic conditions in the least developed countries required, among other things, substantial and concrete international support measures. The Ministers declared that the success of the Conference would be measured by the nature and extent of action-oriented and operational commitments that would have the greatest impact and significantly contribute to arresting and decisively reversing marginalization, eradicating poverty and thereby improving the social economic conditions in the least developed countries. They called for urgent action by development partners to reverse the declining trends in ODA flows and early realization of the internationally agreed ODA targets for least developed countries no later than 2005. They also called for providing broad, deep and immediate debt relief to all least developed countries including through debt cancellation. Furthermore, they called for the provision of secure and predictable market access through bound, duty-free and quota-free access for all of their products within a specified time frame. They attached great importance to the need for an appropriate and effective mechanism for implementation, follow-up, review and monitoring of the Programme of Action. They called upon the Secretary-General to establish an Office of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, with adequate financial and human resources, headed by a high-level representative, immediately after the Conference.

G. Preparatory expert and issue-oriented meetings

88. As part of the preparatory process for the Conference and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/187, the Conference secretariat organized three expert-level preparatory meetings: in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the English-speaking African least developed countries from 27 to 29 March 2000; in Kathmandu, Nepal, for the Asian and Pacific island least developed countries from 3 to 5 April 2000; and in Niamey, the Niger, from 18 to 20 April 2000 for the French-speaking African least developed countries. These meetings were hosted by the Governments of Ethiopia, Nepal and the Niger, respectively, and were organized in close collaboration with UNDP, ECA and ESCAP which provided substantive as well as logistic support for the meetings. The reports[22] of these

meetings were made available to the third inter-agency consultation and the first session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee.

89. A number of pre-Conference meetings and events were organized in collaboration with the Conference secretariat in the year 2001 as part of the preparatory process for the Conference. Those included meetings on: Enhancing Productive Capacities: The Role of the Private Sector (Oslo, 29-31 January); the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance for Least Developed Countries (Geneva, 29-31 January); Enhancing Productive Capacities: The Role of International Investment (Bonn, 12 and 13 March); High-level Meeting on Energy (Vienna, 14-16 March); Meeting on Trade (London, 19 and 20 March); Workshop on Building Capacities for Mainstreaming Gender in Development Strategies (Cape Town, 21-23 March);[23] Workshop on Enhancing Productive Capacities and Diversification of Commodities in Least Developed Countries (Geneva, 22 and 23 March);[24] Workshop on Tourism and Development in Least Developed Countries (Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Spain, 26-30 March);[25] Meeting on Health (Ottawa, 28 and 29 March); and High-level Interregional Round Table on Industrial Property for Least Developed Countries (Lisbon, 1 and 2 February). The reports of these meetings and events were made available to the meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee and the Conference.

H. Public information activities

90. The Conference secretariat, in close cooperation with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, formulated and implemented a comprehensive communications strategy for the Conference, focused on increasing awareness of the situation of the least developed countries and on generating interest in the Conference itself. Organizations and agencies of the United Nations system participating in the Conference, United Nations information centres, the European Commission, and the Belgian Government also contributed, as did an international public relations firm, which offered its services on a pro bono basis.

91. Implementation of the strategy began as early as the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee. Print products included two brochures; press releases; a press kit; a poster; and the placement of several interviews and Op-Eds. Audio-visual and electronic products consisted of a number of television and radio interviews, the production of a b-roll and television magazines, and the design and launch of a Conference web site. A Conference exhibit and journalist fellowship programme for 41 journalists from least developed countries were other components — the latter a result of joint efforts by UNCTAD, UNDP, the United Nations information centres and financing from EU.

92. The strategy focused primarily on mobilizing the major international media and on forging partnerships with targeted media, leading to the production and broadcast of a number of television specials. The result was significant television coverage and extensive daily radio coverage, especially in the French-speaking world; in general, almost all the major print and broadcast media worldwide either attended or covered the Conference.

93. The strategy was funded by an allotment from the regular budget of the General Assembly and by a contribution from EU.

I. Support to the preparatory process for the Conference by bilateral and multilateral sources

94. A number of Member States and organizations made contributions to the preparatory process for the Conference at the global and country levels.

95. The following countries provided support to the pre-Conference events referred to in paragraph 89 above: Austria, Canada, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Spain, South Africa and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

96. The European Commission decided that each least developed country member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States might, if it so wished, utilize up to 80,000 euros from national European Development Fund (EDF) allocations for the purpose of facilitating preparations at the national level. For the Asian least developed countries, the European Commission will support the follow-up and implementation of the Programme of Action up to an amount of 1 million euros.

97. The European Commission also made a generous grant to the UNCTAD secretariat for the purposes of:

(a) enabling the participation of two officials from each least developed country at the Conference; (b) finalizing preparations for the non-governmental organizations forum; and (c) facilitating as wide a participation as possible of other officials from least developed countries, including journalists, city mayors, parliamentarians, and other participants in the civil society events associated with the Conference. The total value of the contribution, which included costs incurred by the European Commission as host organization for the Conference itself, was of the order of 4.5 million euros.

98. UNDP provided resources for country-level preparations in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, the Sudan and Yemen. It also supported the preparatory process at various stages, in particular through the Resident Coordinators in the least developed countries, especially in matters relating to the preparation of national programmes of action. It seconded to the Conference secretariat one of its senior staff members who acted as Deputy Executive Secretary of the Conference.

Notes

[1] A/CONF.191/11.

[2] A/CONF.191/12.

[3] See *Report of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Paris, 3-14 September 1990* (A/CONF.147/18), part one.

[4] A/CONF.191/CP/1-46.

[5] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[6] General Assembly resolution S-21/2, annex.

[7] See *Final Report of the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 2000).

[8] See *Report of the World Food Summit, 13-17 November 1996, Part one* (Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1997), appendix.

[9] See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

[10] See *Legal Instruments Embodying the Results of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, done at Marrakesh on 15 April 1994* (GATT secretariat publication, Sales No. GATT/1994-7).

[11] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[12] General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex.

[13] See A/CONF.191/2.

[14] See A/CONF.191/3.

[15] See A/CONF.191/5.

[16] See A/CONF.191/IPC/7 and 9.

[17] See A/CONF.191/IPC/15.

[18] See A/CONF.191/IPC/16.

[19] See A/CONF.191/IPC/6, 8 and 14.

[20] See A/CONF.191/BP/5.

[21] See A/CONF.191/9 and Corr.1.

[22] See A/CONF.191/IPC/2-4.

[23] See A/CONF.191/BP/2.

[24] See A/CONF.191/BP/3.

[25] See A/CONF.191/BP.4.